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From: Hutchinson, Marcella
Sent: Thur 8/13/2015 3:45:47 PM
Subject: FW: [WQ News] Mine waste has fouled the Animas River before

FYI – nice history of spills since the 1970s. Local NM paper

From: wq-news@googlegroups.com [mailto:wq-news@googlegroups.com] **On Behalf Of** Loretta Lohman
Sent: Thursday, August 13, 2015 9:27 AM
To: wQ-news@googlegroups.com; coriv@googlegroups.com; Larry MacDonnell; Mike Williams; Michelle DeLaria; Kathleen Reilly
Subject: [WQ News] Mine waste has fouled the Animas River before

Mine waste has fouled the Animas River before

Hannah Grover, The (Farmington, N.M.) Daily Times 5:50 a.m. EDT August 13, 2015

Mining's toxic legacy across the West Trevor Hughes/USA TODAY



(Photo: Jon Austria, The (Farmington, N.M.) Daily Times)

FARMINGTON, N.M. — In 1978, after a mine shaft beneath a high-altitude lake north of Silverton, Colo., collapsed releasing millions of gallons of sediment-laden water that found its way into the Animas River, neither federal nor state officials in Colorado notified New Mexico of the incident.

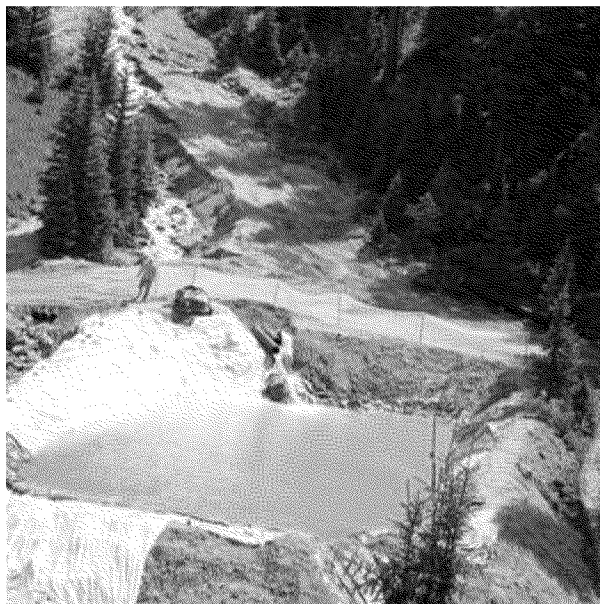
Afterward, a Colorado Department of Health official vowed that never again would New Mexico officials learn of mine waste in the river days after the contamination first occurred.

But it did happen again last week after U.S. Environmental Protection Agency workers accidentally released more than 3 million gallons of water contaminated with mine waste into the Animas River.



The Environmental Protection Agency mistakenly released 3 million gallons of toxic waste water from an abandoned mine into Colorado's Animas River. That number is three times its original estimate. KUSA-TV

New Mexico Gov. Susana Martinez said it was Southern Ute Tribe officials who first notified the state of the spill — nearly 24 hours after the incident. In the late '70s, the disaster started when Lake Emma collapsed into the mine shaft, flooding the mine with millions of gallons of water, mud and sediment.



USA TODAY

Toxic mines taint the West's waterways

The mine waste and water then spilled out the mouth of the Sunnyside Mine, operated by Sunnyside Gold Corp., and eventually entered the Animas River.

The Colorado Department of Health assumed the EPA was going to contact New Mexico officials.

Two days later, former New Mexico governor Tom Bolack noticed fish in an irrigation ditch were dying and called the local health department. When New Mexico health department officials contacted Colorado, Fred Matter, a Colorado health department official, realized that the communities downstream had not been informed.

Tommy Bolack, the son of Tom Bolack, said he remembers seeing a lot of dead fish on the southern part of his property in Farmington with access to the Animas River.

"We didn't have any warning of it," Tommy Bolack said.

Since mining began in the area around Silverton, Colo., in the late 1800s, there have been a series of spills that have contaminated the river and caused concern for communities downstream.



Tommy

Bolack said last week wasn't the first time he's seen the Animas River turn yellow, but he added that this was a brighter yellow than previous spills.

"It's going to pass, just like all of the others have," Bolack said.

Bill Simon said that since he became coordinator of the Animas River Stakeholders Group in 1994, he has seen five major discharges into the Animas River.

"This one happened to be more colorful than other ones so it got the attention of more people," Simon said.

About 18.6 million tons of ore was extracted from the mines during Silverton's heyday, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Some of the mill tailings produced from that mining activity were placed in impoundments after 1935 in an effort to prevent them from polluting the Animas River.

Simon said this effort helped reduce the pollution draining into the Animas River and some of the original dikes holding back the tailings have never breached.

However, when the dams do breach, "you end up with this huge amount of waste that comes down all at once," Simon said.

That also happened in June 1975 when a pond at the Mayflower Mill that was holding back mine tailings was breached.

The mill was operated by Standard Metals Co. and manager Allan Bird hypothesized, in a *Daily Times* story from the time, that the spill was caused by a combination of human error and heavy rains.

He said the pond had been in place for 45 years without incident and that the foreman was on vacation when the pond dike broke.

About a week later, a second spill occurred at the same mine, however the second spill was not as severe as the first.

Almost exactly three years later, the Sunnyside mine shaft beneath Lake Emma — which had been used as a mine waste dump — collapsed and caused water mixed with mud and mine waste to flow into the Animas River.

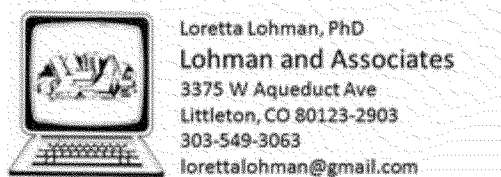
Simon described this event as a "pretty serious disaster."

Because the collapse occurred on a Sunday when no one was working, no miners were hurt or killed.

Cleaning up after the collapse took two years and, after New Mexico officials were notified of the contamination, water from the Animas River into local reservoirs was shut off, according to *Daily Times* archives.

"I would have rather been contacted twice than not at all," George Goldstein, who at the time was secretary of the New Mexico Health and Environment Department, told the Associated Press in 1978. "I'm sure they felt awful about it, but that's no help if it had been a disaster. I'm sure it won't happen again."

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